

# 1998: THE YEAR IN AMERICAN GO

by Roy Laird, AGA President

1998 was a good year for the game of go in the US. A packed schedule of tournaments and events offered players a rich panoply of local and regional events throughout the year. In addition to dozens of tournaments, weekend pro workshops continued to grow in popularity, showing that the American go-playing public wants to get stronger. New highlights included a hugely successful first Summer Youth Go Camp and a major program to recruit teachers and provide them with the technical support they need to bring go to their clubs, schools and communities.

## **A New President, a New American Go Journal**

On January 1, Roy Laird began his first elected term as AGA President, replacing Phil Straus, who had served as President since 1993. Laird plans to focus on membership growth, public awareness, and increased sponsorship for events and youth programs.

Since 1984, Laird had served as managing editor of The American Go Journal. Succeeding him in this role is former Membership Secretary and Chapter Services Coordinator Chris Garlock, a journalist and writer who has also served as executive producer on Jim Hightower's nationally syndicated radio show. The new Journal's larger format, bright design and appeal to the general reader have made it a big hit.

## **Emphasis on Spreading Go in Schools**

The AGA has begun to encourage and support Go teachers in schools and after-school programs, and dozens of little communities of little players are springing up, from Virginia to Michigan to Washington State. Through a generous grant from the Ing Foundation, the AGA distributes teaching manuals, beginner's sets and other materials to teachers and organizers, who are seen by after-school programs as a godsend. Other organizers are moving right into the classroom. Go-playing children around the country meet monthly on the Internet Go Server at a "CyberCamp" featuring pro lessons and a 9x9 tournament.

There's even the suggestion that go may enhance school performance. Bill Cobb taught go to six classes in a Virginia private school, and compared their standardized test scores before and after learning go. Average scores improved in some areas in every class. Next he plans a controlled study, comparing children who learned go to children who did not. Cobb's class has started intramural competition with a school in Minnesota, and the idea of school-to-school intramural Internet competition seems to be catching on.

Thanks to a generous grant from the Ing Chang-ki Goe Educational Foundation, the AGA has been able to develop and distribute materials for teachers and organizers. More and more members and Chapters around the country are requesting and utilizing materials which include:

**The AGA Starter Set** which contains a wooden 9x9 board, plastic stones in molded containers, a copy of *The Way To Go* and a response card to obtain go-playing freeware. The initial production run of 1000 sets are all in use. This year the AGA ordered up 500 more, and they are dwindling fast.

**25 Demonstration Boards** manufactured in California which have also been distributed to Chapters around the country. Another 25 will be available in 1999.

**The Game of Go — A Manual for Teachers, Students and Organizers** which was produced and funded by the American Go Foundation. It includes over forty pages of ideas and inspiration from winners of the AGF's "Teacher of the Year" Award and other experienced teachers and organizers.

**Asia and the Game of Go**, a 16-page color booklet aimed at children. Produced by the European Go Cultural Center, this booklet was sent to all US teachers and organizers and is still available in bulk for teachers who need a visually exciting way to introduce go to middle school children.

**Teacher Packets** including reprints of teaching materials from past American Go Journals, posters, and other organizational aids also went out to educators and organizers looking to bring go into their schools and communities.

In early 1999 the AGA sponsored the first-ever "**Go Teaching Teleconference**" Nine go teaching enthusiasts met for over an hour by telephone to share ideas, set priorities and figure out ways to work together.

AGA President Roy Laird sees support for these efforts as a top priority. Other projects in the works include an instructional/promotional video and a line of branded merchandise and go-related paraphernalia for use as small prizes and tournaments and other events, and a national intramural youth go tournament.

Go's increasing popularity among American children became evident early in the year at Zhu-jiu Jiang's annual tournament in Santa Clara, co-sponsored by the AGA with funds provided by the Ing Chang-ki Goe Education Foundation and organized with the help of Bay Area organizers, especially Ernest Brown. Almost one hundred children attended a special youth tournament on the second day, literally driving the grownups into another room by their sheer numbers. Congratulations to San Francisco Go Club organizers John Kwei, Reid Augustin and Mike Bull, as well to Joe Lee and his father Guo-jiang Zhen.

### **The Fourth North American Masters Tournament**

The world's only professional tournament on the Internet once again came to a successful conclusion for Zhu-jiu Jiang 9-Dan, the only player who has ever held the title of North American Master. Directed as always by NAMT co-creator Chen-dao Lin, the twelve-player event started in January, as lower-ranked pros played a series of best-of-three eliminations for spots in the final round robin. Jimmy Cha emerged as the challenger, only to fall to Jiang in two straight games.

But there were no hard feelings. At a later meeting of the American Professional Go Players' Association, Cha, who is the Director of the Association, nominated Jiang for the office of APGPA President. He was elected unanimously.

### **The 12<sup>th</sup> North American Fujitsu Qualifying Tournament**

The Qualifying Tournament for the 1998 Fujitsu Cup was held in December of 1997. As we reported last year, the winner, Michael Redmond, went on to score a stunning victory over Seo Bong-sook before losing in the third round. The complete results are listed below.

At the Qualifying Tournament for the 1999 Fujitsu Cup in Houston, Texas in January 1999, Michael's traditional nemesis Jimmy Cha prevailed. He will play for the US in the World Fujitsu Cup.

## **The 14<sup>th</sup> US Go Congress**

This year the world's oldest board game came to the oldest city in North America. In the first week of August, over 200 players gathered at the campus of St. John's University on the outskirts of Santa Fe, New Mexico for seven days of play, instruction and fun. The glorious setting made for a relaxed atmosphere as go players from all over the world competed, played casual games, studied with the fifteen professionals in attendance and socialized into the night.

More than fifty children attended the Congress, for the second straight year. This year they seemed to penetrate a bit further up into the field in the US Open. In fact, the winner of the US Open, Jie Li, is only seventeen years old. He just moved to America from China, and as of early 1999 no American amateur had yet won an even game against him! The top-finishing citizen, Ted Ning, will represent the US at the 1999 World Amateur Go Championship.

After fourteen years, Congress days have settled into a consistent format. Each morning started with a round of the US Open. As players finished, they drifted into lecture halls with their game records, where pros offered analysis. After lunch, participants chose from a cornucopia of lectures, simultaneous games, and other teaching events. This year, thanks to the generous sponsorship of the Hitachi Corp., we were honored by the presence of fifteen professionals from North America and around the world. Japan's impressive team of four professional teacher representatives included Michael Redmond 8-Dan, venerable and beloved Congress figure Noriyuki Nakayama 6-Dan, and Yuki Shigeno 2-Dan, an international ambassador of the Nihon Kiin who lives in Milan, Italy. Nagasaki, Yuji 9-Dan also attended on behalf of the Kiin's friendly rival in Western Japan, the Kansai Kiin. China sent Zheng, Hong 9-Dan and Li, Yachan 6-Dan to teach on their behalf. Kim, Nyung Won 4-Dan and Nam, Chi-young 1-Dan, who had attended last year's Congress in Lancaster, represented Korea.

North American resident pros Zhu-jiu Jiang 9-Dan and Jimmy Cha 4-Dan battled for the Fourth North American Masters Tournament, with Jiang prevailing for his fourth consecutive victory. Jiang's wife Nai-wei Rui 9-Dan, widely regarded as the strongest woman in the world, was also on hand to analyze the NAMT games and to give lectures and simultaneous games. Redmond's wife Xian-xian Niu, a 2-Dan pro, also taught and played when she was not minding their two delightful little girls. Other North American pros included beloved sensei Yi-lun Yang 7-Dan from Los Angeles, Congress veteran Xiaoren He 5-Dan of Montreal, and 1-Dans Janice Kim and James Kerwin. The AGA is very grateful to Hitachi Corp. for its support for these professional events.

Each evening featured a special event — lightning go, small board go, team go, pair go, and even "crazy go"! Meanwhile participants played casual games or competed in the ongoing self-paired handicap tournament. Later on each evening, night owls settled down for a bit of card-playing, song-singing and general merry-making. Others wandered over to the playing room to watch sixteen top North American amateurs battle it out in the invitational North American Ing Cup, won this year by Jong Moon Lee. Some also stopped by the North American Computer Go Championship.

Congress-goers enjoyed the full range of go activities they have come to expect. Throughout the day, private lessons from professional players were available. Focus groups met on subjects as diverse as teaching, ratings, tournaments, promotion, and the Internet throughout the afternoon and evening, and sometimes at meals just to fit it all in. Wednesday, the midpoint day, was reserved for travel, sight-seeing and general relaxation. This year many visitors took advantage of

trips to Los Alamos and Anasazi pueblos, yet fifty hard-core players stayed behind to play in the four-round one-day “Die hard” tournament.

### **The American Go Foundation**

The AGF is a tax-deductible philanthropic foundation formed in the 1980’s dedicated to the promotion of go. Donors to the AGF can deduct their contributions from their taxes. The AGF has quietly supported the activities of teachers and organizers for years. 1998 was the Foundation’s biggest year yet, helping teachers and organizers throughout the US to get the supplies they need to teach go in their communities.

At the US Go Congress, the AGF gave its third Teacher of the Year Award to Susan Weir, the organizer of the Summer Go Camp for kids, and a dynamo driving all sorts of go activity in her home town of Ann Arbor, Michigan. Weir teaches go in several local schools and has organized a monthly “Cyber Camp” for go-playing children throughout the US, with professional instruction and games on the Internet Go Server. She has even asked the Ann Arbor school board to include go in the elementary school curriculum. Under her plan, all Ann Arbor students would encounter go during the fourth grade as part of the math sequence, and again in sixth grade under international studies.

At their annual meeting, the AGF Board also decided for the first time to consider grant applications that include payment of a modest stipend to teachers. Donations and inquiries can be directed to: The American Go Foundation, c/o Mary Laird, 211 West 106<sup>th</sup> St. #3C, New York, NY 10025.

### **Go on the Web**

The World Wide Web is having a revolutionary impact in many areas of life, none more so than go. An article in The New York Times entitled “Online Samurai Transform an Ancient Gem” described the world of the Internet Go Server, where play is “fast, furious — and anonymous.” Other servers sites such as the No Name Go Server (nngs), the Internet Gaming Zone and Yahoo’s Java-based site were also mentioned.

The American Go Association plays a leading role in the worldwide cyber-go community. Although other face-to-face tournament games are “mirrored” online, the North American Masters Tournament remains the only serious go tournament in the world actually played on the Internet. The AGA also sponsors the monthly online “CyberCamp” for children. The AGA remains grateful to the Internet Go Server for continuing support and assistance without which this tournament would not be possible. The AGA has also organized a series of “reflectors” or interest groups, where members post messages which all members receive. The “goteach” reflector has over 100 subscribers from all over the world. Another reflector carries extensive discussion of arcane issues arising from the various standard sets of rules. The AGA Executive Committee does most of its day-to-day business by reflector. The American Professional Go Players’ Association also has a reflector through the AGA.

The AGA’s Web site (usgo.org) greets about 1000 new visitors every week, who can join online by credit card. A wealth of resources and information is available there, and Webmaster Jeff Shaevel adds to it all the time. One recent addition is the classic introductory pamphlet The Way to Go formatted in Adobe Acrobat to print out in color. In the works are a teachers’ resource page and “streaming video” of the US Go Congress.

## **Working for Growth**

Interest in go in America continues to grow. On most weekends in 1998, at least one go tournament was in progress somewhere in the US. Four-day workshops with professionals also continued to grow in popularity. American players don't just want to "throw stones" — they also want to improve. Go is also becoming more publicly visible, more easily recognized by the average American. Articles about go appeared in The New York Times, The Sciences, Games magazines and in many local and regional newspapers. Even a character on the popular youth-oriented American TV series Ally McBeal was seen playing go in one episode. With all this activity we hope to reach our membership goal — "2000 Members By 2000."